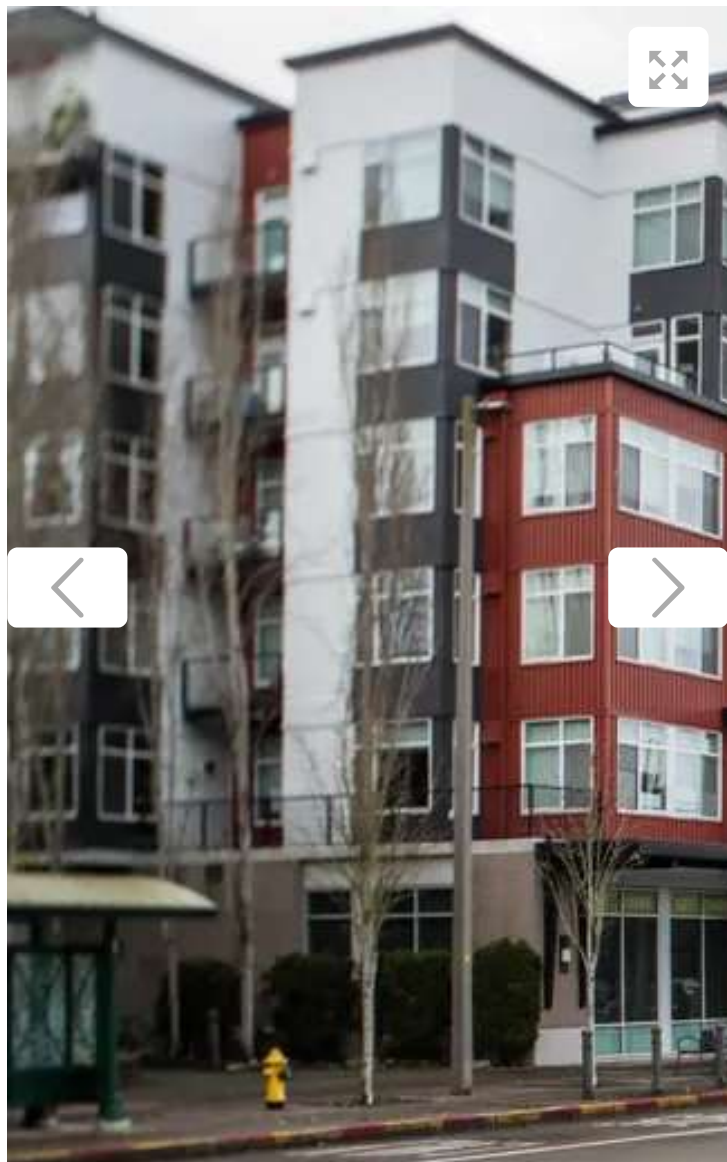


Local Politics

The Seattle Times

Five Seattle suburbs added new landlord-renter laws this year. Here's what they do.

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1 of 2 | Apartment complexes Thursday morning in Redmond, one of the cities in the Seattle area that have approved renter protections that go beyond those provided under state law. (Kevin Clark / The Seattle Times)



By [Daniel Beekman](#) 

Seattle Times staff reporter

Five Seattle suburbs have adopted new renter protections this year amid a surge in organizing by tenant advocates across King County.

The laws passed in various combinations by [Burien](#), [Issaquah](#), [Kenmore](#), [Kirkland](#) and [Redmond](#) deal with rent-increase notices, move-in costs, late fees, evictions and property conditions, among other issues.

They go beyond the state laws that apply to landlords and renters everywhere in Washington, which serve as the baseline in many cities, and they resemble some laws that have been implemented in Seattle.

The Stay Housed, Stay Healthy Coalition — an alliance that King County nonprofits, community groups, labor organizations and political organizations formed amid the COVID-19 pandemic — lobbied for the changes in each of the suburban cities, partnering with local advocates.

Fernando Medina Corey, a Redmond renter who works in tech, knocked on hundreds of doors to organize Eastside residents, he said. Many shared concerns about rent increases causing them to become homeless or forcing them to move and their kids to change schools, said Medina Corey, 30.

“Hearing stories like that over and over again was infuriating,” he said, describing advance notice as crucial in a state where landlords are generally allowed to raise rents (for non-subsidized units) by any amount.

The coalition urged the suburbs to pass protections like those approved [last year](#) for unincorporated areas of King County, such as Skyway and White Center, and like some laws also adopted by Seattle, said Katie Wilson, general secretary at the Transit Riders Union and a leader in the campaign.

Temporary bans on rent increases and evictions that were established in response to the pandemic have expired, yet many people remain saddled with rent debt, the Seattle area is still struggling with a shortage of affordable housing and rents have climbed, advocates like Wilson say. For example, median rents in Redmond were 14% higher last month than three years ago, though they've dropped since a peak in June, per Apartment List data.

"I am glad our council could implement some common-sense tenant protections," Redmond City Council Vice President Vanessa Kritzer said in a Stay Housed Stay Healthy news release this month.

Landlord groups say the new laws will raise business costs and risks, thereby spurring property owners to boost rents or sell their rentals.

"We have a housing supply crisis and these so-called tenant protections address a perceived symptom but will do nothing to address the crisis and I believe will actually exacerbate the crisis," said Ryan Makinster, director of government affairs at the Washington Multi-Family Housing Association.

Landlords required to provide a longer period of advance notice for rent increases, without knowing how their own costs may change over that time, may err on the high side when deciding how much to charge, said Sean Flynn, executive director of the Rental Housing Association of Washington.

Passing renter protections city-by-city, with different laws in each place, is creating a "hodgepodge" that will make compliance harder, Flynn added.

New laws

Under the new laws, according to a summary by the Stay Housed Stay Healthy Coalition, landlords in Burien, Issaquah, Kenmore, Kirkland and Redmond must provide 120 days advance notice for rent increases over 3%.

In Burien, Kenmore, Redmond and Kirkland, landlords must also provide 180 days notice for increases over 10%. The state's requirement is **60 days** for all increases. Unincorporated King County has a 120-day requirement for increases over 3%, while Seattle has a 180-day requirement for all increases.

In Burien, Kenmore, Kirkland and Redmond but not Issaquah, the new laws cap move-in fees and deposits at an amount equal to one month of rent (with exceptions for

subsidized housing units with rents based on income) and give renters the right to pay those costs in installments. Unincorporated King County and Seattle have similar laws on the books.

The new laws cap late fees at \$10 in Burien and at 1.5% of monthly rent in Kenmore and Redmond, according to the coalition. Neither Kirkland nor Issaquah limited late fees.

Burien, Kenmore and Redmond passed laws that say renters on fixed incomes can adjust the dates their rents are due to match up with the dates they collect their incomes. Those cities also passed laws that say rental applicants don't need to provide social security numbers to prospective landlords.

Burien and Kenmore passed laws related to "just causes" that landlords must cite to pursue evictions, adding to the state's law by extending those regulations to lease non-renewals.

Only Burien passed a law barring rent increases for properties with defective conditions. Seattle and unincorporated King County have similar laws.

Seattle, the state's largest city, also has a number of other protections, like a law that requires landlords to pay relocation assistance when residents are displaced by large rent hikes and a ban on most wintertime evictions.

What's next

Wilson said the campaign for new protections in the suburbs was bolstered this year by ARCH, a partnership between King County and Eastside cities that develops policies and manages programs related to affordable housing.

[In April](#), ARCH's executive board recommended that its member jurisdictions take action on rent-increase notice requirements, move-in fees and late fees. In doing so, the board noted that more than 12,000 households in its member jurisdictions are severely cost-burdened, according to recent census estimates, meaning they spend at least 50% of their income on housing.

Tenant resources

Find more information at tenantsunion.org/rights and washingtonlawhelp.org/issues/housing.

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New renter protections didn't secure approval in every suburb that debated them. The Newcastle City Council narrowly voted down a package of laws. But the Stay Healthy Stay Housed Coalition plans to resume its campaign next year. SeaTac could take steps soon, and there have been rumblings in Bothell and Bellevue, Wilson said. There also could be a push for stronger protections at the state level when the Legislature convenes next month, Wilson added.

The Legislature could make existing laws more effective [by establishing](#) an expedited court process to enforce them, said Edmund Witter, managing attorney at the King County Bar Association's Housing Justice Project. Seattle has an enforcement apparatus but smaller cities typically don't, so renters may have to sue — in a process that can take up to a year, Witter said. Though most landlords play by the rules, there are always some who don't, he said.

Medina Corey, the Redmond renter and organizer, also worries about awareness and enforcement. Not long after Redmond passed its new protections, his household received a rent-increase notice that violated the city's updated requirements, he said. Because Medina Corey had been working on the issue, he knew about the law and who to call for advice.

“But the vast majority of people ... probably don't know about the law” and have limited means to challenge violations, he said.

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